



# Blog: Connecting Teacher Professional Development and Coaching for Student Improvement

## Overview

Teacher development matters when you want to ensure student growth in content and language proficiency. In Session 6 of the language immersion school series, we reviewed the [Professional Development Planning Tool](#) for planning whole-group and small-group professional development. This tool makes a great starting point for thinking about what professional development will look like on your campus. Once you've planned your initial group training focuses and activities in that tool, consider how individual observation and feedback can add to your professional development ecosystem. A regular schedule of observation and feedback, or coaching cycles, can help individualize teacher support. Personalizing and documenting coaching cycles through a tracker helps to ensure appropriate follow-up so that every teacher in your program gets what they need. This blog will explore our Individual Coaching Tracker, a tool designed to help you track coaching cycles and reward growth.

## Establishing Focus

For individual coaching, select two to three focus areas in which your faculty are at varying proficiency levels. In your initial observations of teachers, focus on these areas to determine the starting proficiency level and the most significant opportunity for each teacher. In other words, what is the teacher most novice in? That is where you will start. On the Individual Coaching Tracker, you will notice three levels of proficiency — novice, intermediate, and advanced. A teacher is considered novice in a knowledge or skill area if they have limited proficiency. The intermediate level indicates they can practically apply or demonstrate the knowledge or skill but at varying degrees of success or consistency. Teachers reach advanced once they consistently use or demonstrate the knowledge or skill at a high level. Once you've identified each teacher's area of most significant opportunity, replace the text in the "current focus area" box with that knowledge or skill.

After your initial observations to identify proficiency and individual focus areas, sit down with teachers to further narrow the focus by creating a SMART goal. SMART goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely goals. To learn how to write SMART goals, review [the University of California's guide](#). Once a focus is established for each teacher, you're ready to implement coaching cycles by conducting regular observations and feedback for each teacher.

## Observation

Teacher observation describes the practice of sitting in on a class to either provide feedback to or learn from the teacher. Conduct observation and feedback at regular intervals to create consistency for teachers. In the Individual Coaching Tracker, you'll notice a dropdown selection for coaching frequency. Coaching frequency describes how often the teacher will be observed and receive feedback on progress toward their SMART goal. This frequency may vary across your faculty depending on differences in experience and proficiency levels. Start the year doing weekly observations of teachers new to the



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profession or the content. However, you may choose to conduct monthly observations for your most experienced and proficient teachers. Observers can be people on the leadership team or other teachers. The teacher's supervisor often leads observations to provide feedback; however, you can also leverage other teachers or elders who are advanced in that teacher's area of opportunity. Some schools and districts have implemented rubrics or checklists to guide observers' note-taking during a teacher observation.

The University of Nebraska at Lincoln has a [Classroom Observation Checklist](#) that makes a good example if you want to create your own form based on your professional development focus areas. However, you don't always have to score observations formally. In fact, formal scoring or communication for every observation may negatively impact your school's culture and teachers' willingness to engage in coaching cycles. Sitting down with your teachers to provide specific, clear feedback and an action step after an observation can communicate what you noticed and support teachers without constant scoring.

### Feedback

After observation, the next step in the coaching cycle is feedback. Feedback should include a specific opportunity you noticed from observation and one action step for the teacher. The opportunity and action step inform the next observations until the teacher addresses the feedback and implements the action step consistently.

The following is an example of feedback and an action step for a teacher whose focus area is student agency<sup>1</sup>:

- *Feedback:* Increase opportunities for individual student voice and choice.
- *Action Step:* Write first, talk second — give students a writing task prior to class discussion so that every student reflects and answers independently but still maintains the choice to share aloud.

As you can see in this example, the action step is concrete and bite-sized while still addressing the feedback to support students in taking an active role in their learning and building confidence, as referenced in the definition of student agency. While the observer should provide feedback, the action step should be co-created with the teacher through postobservation dialogue. Some schools and districts use a protocol to structure this dialogue. The [Uncommon Schools model](#) for giving effective feedback is one such protocol to use or adapt. Regardless of your strategy, deliver feedback and co-construct an action step after each observation with your teacher's preferences, motivation styles, and needs in mind.

### Leveraging and Celebrating Growth

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<sup>1</sup> Student agency: when students are empowered to take an active role in their learning and experience of school; it is often cultivated through instruction and opportunities for students to build skills and attitudes that develop responsibility, ownership, confidence, and collaboration.



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Once a teacher reaches the advanced level in their initial area of greatest need, observation and feedback should shift to the teacher's next significant opportunity area. As teachers master each area by reaching an advanced level of proficiency, celebrate and honor them in ways that align with your community and your school's culture. Moreover, leverage your new experts by noting their expertise for other staff and inviting them to present professional development or mentor others. One specific example of noting and celebrating mastery is having a sign outside each classroom that reads, "I'm an expert! Ask me about..." At the beginning of the year, every teacher would have specific knowledge and skills to post here. As they continue to master other knowledge and skills through professional development, add these new developments to their expert sign.

### Conclusion

As we've touched on, there are several layers to impactful professional development. The coaching cycle layer can support your small-group and whole-group training. Tracking that coaching through a coaching tracker like the Instructional Coaching Tracker provided in this blog can enhance the impact of your professional development by clearly documenting each teacher's needs and growth.

*For more on creating an immersion school, including student learning standards, curriculum development, and language proficiency and assessment, review additional resources posted on the Native American Language Resource Center (NALRC) [program page](#) and watch the Office of Indian Education's [NALRC Summer Series webinars](#).*

### Resources

[The University of California's How to Guide for SMART Goals](#)

[University of Nebraska at Lincoln's Classroom Observation Checklist](#)

[Uncommon Schools – See it. Name it. Do it.](#)

[Professional Development Planning Tool](#)

Coaching Tracker